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Lots of Life Left Yet In 'Rogue Elephant'

Just before the Senate Select Committee presented, amid conspicuous self-congratulation, Volume I of its report on the intelligence community, the CIA scored yet another coup.

Director George Bush hurried up to the Caucus Room for a secret session with the senators and implored them to keep the intelligence budget a secret. The committee voted a typical compromise: They would pass the buck to the full Senate.

So on page 4/0 of the report, where the numbers ought to be, there are blank spaces. Considering that last week the Supreme Court ruled that it's okay for the feds to look at your bank account, you have to say that government secrecy is, in this Bicentennial of our liberty, gaining over individual privacy.

The Senate could, of course, gather up its courage and assert that people who can't keep their own bank records a secret have the right to know how money they give to the government is being spent by the spooks.

One of the arguments made by some who voted against immediate disclosure was that it might make it easier to persuade the Senate to create an oversight committee. The fact that there is any question at all about such a committee — one which might include a soul or two who would not melt at the mention of "national security" — suggests how splendidly the CIA has weathered the storm of congressional investigation.

FIFTEEN MONTHS AGO, when the "rogue elephant" was dragged into public view for examination of its ugliness, some people said there was nothing to do with the beast but shoot it. But as the revelations about its ugliness, some people said there of banks, newspapers and airlines, its habit of buying foreign elections and foreign officials, a Watergate-conditioned citizenry turned away. People didn't want to hear about it.

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Now there is no doubt about the beast's survival. The committee did not even recommend an outright ban on covert activities, although it did suggest less promiscuous use.

Nobody has been punished, either, for what was done, or for failing to tell the truth about it.

The secretary of state and the former director of the CIA, Richard Helms, who is our ambassador to Iran, made contradictory — to say the least — statements about Chile and domestic spying to congressional committees.

Chairman Frank Church, who is running for the presidency, has not made a federal case of it. The record, he said was sent to the Justice Department. Nothing has happened.

Atty. Gen. Edward Levi went before the committee just before Bush. He was trying to censor some language in Volume II relative to illegal domestic spying. That suggests whose side he is on. No prosecutions, particularly in an election year, seem likely.

THE COMMITTEE wants the attorney general to be added to the National Security Council. He would presumably warn the plotters when they were about to break the law. Neither of two previous attorneys general, Robert Kennedy and John Mitchell, seemed particularly sensitive on this point. Kennedy was involved in Cuban plots. Mitchell appears never to have read the Constitution.

"We are trying to deepen accountability," says Sen. Walter F. Mondale, D-Minn.

Accountability was a word unknown at CIA headquarters. Things were set in train on one man's orders to a chosen few. He did not tell his associates or the inspector general. When things went sour, the papers were destroyed and all kept mum.

Nothing quite illuminates the ice-cold arrogance of the agency than a memo written by Richard Helms during the period when the CIA was conducting experiments with LSD on unwitting subjects:

"While I share your uneasiness and distaste for any program which tends to intrude upon an individual's private and legal prerogatives, I believe it is necessary that the agency maintain a central role in this activity, keep current on enemy capabilities on the manipulation of human behavior and maintain an offensive capability."

SO DR. FRANK OLSON, unbeknownst to himself, was given a glass of Cointreau with 70 micrograms of LSD in it on Nov. 19, 1953. Eight days later, he threw himself out of a New York hotel room window.

Nobody was responsible. The individuals involved were shown a reprimand for "bad judgment," one which they were assured would not be made part of their official personnel file.

George Bush says they don't do things like that any more. He says the beast has been housebroken. Many members of Congress want to believe him, just as they preferred not to know what was going on at the time.

There ought to be a law, and Congress may get around to writing one. But as the vote on the money showed, it's not a sure thing.